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The Keepers

● **H. E. Francis**

"GUS!" Effie called through the back-door screen. "They're comin' to the house agin, Gus."

At first in the strong September wind her brother did not hear, bent over in the coop as he was, talking to the chickens — and his old head so hard-of-hearing. So she had to call it again —

"Gus, they're comin' to the house."

But this time, straightening his back in a long, slow rise, he saw her across the yard behind the screen, and heard her too. And though he heard only her voice, not the words she said, before he could even ask them, he had seen the three men get out of the glittering new car and walk up on the grass. He set the feed can down outside the coop and hooked the door. There had been no anxiety in Effie's voice — nothing. Only . . . she was standing there; she had bothered to leave her rug-making by the window and come to the door, instead of sitting, as always, to wait until he brought the visitors to the house.

"Be there in a minute, Effie," he said, walking feebly across the lawn toward the three. But she stayed. The men strode quickly, covering double the distance Gus walked. Their movement showed him how age held him back — for he did not get halfway across the yard before they were at his side, the first one talking to him in that pushy, fast voice that held neither hostility nor friendliness, which Gus listened to and which, with squinted lids and eyes that did not blink, the man smiled through. Despite that, Gus could even admire the way the man — a Mister Furia, big, light, brown — sharp of eye, with straight-hanging clothes that smelled bought — could look him straight in the eye, so candid, and talk.

"We came back, you see — like we said. We wanted you to have plenty of time. That's why we waited two days before we came back."

The others nodded as if thinking it to themselves.

"We know how hard it is for you and your sister to get to town without a car so we're willing to take you in to vote next Tuesday. Mister Tradwohl will see to it that you get home again."

"Tradwohl?"

But they had explained him to Gus before: Tradwohl, who had made such progress so quickly here in the town.

"And Bartlett? Amos Bartlett?" Gus asked.

"He's the opposition," Mister Furia said. He did not even name the party, yet Gus felt that tautness in his speech, without a flicker seen in his eyes.

"I knew his father," Gus said, "and his grandfather. I never heard of — "

"Tradwohl." Again Mister Furia explained how within a short time Mister Tradwohl had won the town's confidence, had proved a man of integrity — and that his generosity

and efficiency were evident in everything he had done.

"I told you all that," he said.

"I never heard of him though," Gus said, turning away. But the men followed closely, Mister Furia still talking.

"I could spend hours telling you, but let me tell you just one thing he did — "

Gus turned back, staring down at him. Even bent in old age he was taller than all the men, who had to look up to talk to him.

"You knew Lennie Petersen?"

Gus nodded with severe, measuring curiosity.

"And Otto Loam, and Bill Driscoll, Sam Adams, and Willie Ostler?"

He knew them all — old families, all part of the old town.

"Mister Tradwohl gave them homes, cheap too. He lent the money himself — to build a whole project on the bay shore, so that anyone in the town who wished to, would become part — and cheap too — of a community-living project, with its own special regulations. And he was responsible practically alone. Those people are all comfortable now. You know what they came out of and what they had before. Well — You'll remember Long Row, houses set like boxes side by side, and rats and leaking water and sea wash, with a dump packing them in. You remember? Well, it's where they — "

The door slammed to. Effie came out.

"Long Row?" she said. She stood very near Gus. She was very straight. Gus did not realize how straight she was until she stood with others. Straight, and taller than the three young men.

"Yeah, it's cleared out — gone. The trash heap's all removed. No more fire hazards, disease holes — no slum area at all — "

She followed his look at the house then, as if he were describing it. Seeing Gus about to speak out, he said, "And it was all Mister Tradwohl's doings. But that's only the beginning. There'll be more and bigger projects and improvements in the town, greater and faster than you can dream." His arms went out, trying to hold out the size for Gus's vision, his face full of it.

"You ever been a preacher?" Gus asked.

The other two laughed until Mister Furia turned a severe face on them.

"No," he said, relaxing into a concealing snigger.

Now the man was calling him Gus, not Mister Edwards. And he was back on the track of public benefits: "You can live there cheap as the others, with your sister, and have all the comforts you haven't got in this house." He went down the list, enumerating the conveniences and the low cost of operation, all the time looking at the woman, the sister Effie.

Without a move she gazed out over his head, as if watching the colored man outside the old Wilson house across the field beyond.

The wind blew a heavy dust into the grass and over the men. Mister Furia coughed. The two men brushed themselves constantly.

Gus and Effie waited, still, knowing the last had not come yet, because the man had not got to the bottom of the list when he put his hand out, friendly, on Gus's arm.

"There are 1,017 voting citizens in this town, Gus, and a majority of them'll vote for Otto Tradwohl because he's shown what progress

and happy living are, and how to get more of them — fast. This town is going places, Gus."

And though Mister Furia didn't get to the end of it, Gus said, "He don't need me then. He's got majority." His face was hard with fact.

"But you've got to have it in the bag! It's security for you if you get Tradwohl in, and to him a guarantee of security will cinch it."

"I don't know him," Gus said. "I never heard of him."

"That's *exactly* why we're here. Because we *do* know him and we know what he stands for, and we believe in that — so much that we know that once you've seen our new growing out there and see how you can get just what you want through him, you *will* vote for him on Tuesday. After all, everyone should vote, Gus, and everyone should vote for — "

"I voted every election — town 'n state 'n nation," Gus said. "Walked the miles to town. So's she." It was the first time anyone smiled — *she* smiled: for he had told them. She went back into the house and stood behind the screen and watched.

"Listen to reason, man. Don't you want to get your sister out of here? Here's your chance to give her all the comfort she's never had before." The fire of impatience was scarcely held down in him. The old man's immobility, standing before him, a stillness almost as visibly hard and resistant as the old brown skin, irked him. He tried to stand as still, to hold his hands down while his voice spoke. "You can move her into a cleanness and a good living — with a whole world of luxury."

"My great-grandfather built this house," Gus said. He turned to look at it, directing the eyes of the three men. They saw the house and the woman standing in the doorway.

"Looks it," one of the men said, but a quick hard glance from Mister Furia cowered his tongue.

But Gus saw they had not sensed his words.

"You have missed the point," Mister Furia began.

"I don't want no new house 'n all. 'N I don't have no fight with gettin' ahead. If time comes to git, Effie 'n me'll git. We won't stand in the way of what's comin'. But long's we got the right, we'll stay — 'n that's all we ever asked, any of us livin' in this house — just to live the way we want 'f — we don't hurt nothin', even 'f nobody likes it. We ain't askin' 'em to live like us, or we'd have call for messin' with."

"No, you've missed the point."

" — 'n we got chickens," Gus interrupted again. "Eggs to send out every night for sellin'. What'd we do without 'em? 'F they went, we'd have 'most nothin'."

"Well, you don't have to live in the project. That's only one thing Tradwohl has done for the town. There are others — ways of getting jobs so that you can get the most out of job benefits. It's what I been saying. We'll give you the kind of thing you need."

He dropped the Mister now, Gus heard. Tradwohl.

"I'm too old. You know that. A man kin git his own life. He don't need no made-jobs. Effie 'n me — we got enough. 'N we always knowed how to vote too, 'cuz we al'ays voted for the one we thought was best. Don't know nothin' bout your Tradwohl — maybe he's good. We aim to learn. That's only deservin'. We'll vote, come Tuesday."

"How — ?"

"I told you — we'll vote for what we trust."

"Perhaps you'll change your mind . . . ?"

The setting sun was in Gus's face and the little man was black and faceless against it, and the wind picked up his voice and made it weak and hard to hear.

Gus smiled, and without waiting to see if they would go, turned away, saying, "We're glad you come. Thank-ya."

Then Mister Furia was right there beside him, saying hard and fast to him he'd better vote and the right way, because they would be beside him, yes, right beside him (in a loud loud voice above the wind, so standing in the doorway *she* could hear too in case it didn't sink into his mealy brain). "WE WILL BE RIGHT THERE! You'll vote the way we say and we'll give you one more chance to think, because in two days we'll be back — that's all."

It all happened fast and the two men were close, striding on each side like a box around him, with threatening faces to make good Furia's words, asking him: "How old are you?" "I'm eighty," and he added, "She's eighty-three this year." And then they were gone in anger, with steps furious on the gravel path, so their words, "It's pretty old to be homeless!", were still in the air when the car doors slammed and the motor sounded starting down the road. But he didn't stop talking, as if they hadn't gone. "Never missed a 'lection yet. We'll vote like al'ays."

"They'll go to Josh now," Effie said. But he didn't hear.

Back in the kitchen coop, he had already collected a few eggs before he saw the brown dust billow up behind the car in the Wilson yard across the fields, where the young Negro now lived. Afterwards, he collected the eggs, then crated them in the shed, and set them on the far corner of the lawn for the night pick-up truck.

At the house Effie was no longer in the doorway. He went in and sat at the table.

"They're at Josh's place," he said.

She sat by the window, braiding the rugs in slow, steady movement.

II

So now they were at Josh's. They would say the same things to him — but how? For he was college-educated; he was young; and he spoke their language. His life was the same length and times of their lives, and they knew this. So Josh would know better maybe than Gus and Effie what to say and what to hold back to himself. Yet, all the time, Gus was thinking *That ain't so, I know in my bones it ain't so, they'll fight like all the smarties with words that don't mean what they say.* It would just be fast wits set out in fast words between men of the same generation. And if *they* were losing, they would not yet get mad; they would leave to stack up more cleverness to be met by more cleverness until someone ran out. Then they would do what men have always done who have racked their brains and got them so tired they must think with something besides brains — muscles and flesh — so they are done for even before they begin.

Twice they had come to Gus and Effie. The first time it was later than this, in that almost-dark time before Effie lit the oil to save on the electric lights. After, they had gone to Josh's, but not till they had sounded-out Gus about him first:

"Whose house is that? Anybody living in it now?" they'd asked.

. . . always talking good to him, like at a social call, smiling at Effie. But Gus never talked to many people, and sometimes in his deafness he went right on even when they talked, not hearing them, but it would be Effie who stopped him — a habit of a light touch on his elbow . . .

"Josh lives there. A young Negro — Joshua Caldwell."

The men looked at each other.

"You let him come here a lot?"

"We wasn't give to niggers around here — Twenty years that house had no light in it. (He saw it now, a stretch of wood, short and crooked, a solid cut across the straight line of fields beyond, breaking them.) 'N then come that one light burnin' night after night; whenever you was awake after dark you c'd see it. And Effie uneasy wonderin'. How's we to know that man walkin' out there owned it now, till he come close 'n walked right on this land in this yard 'n said he's livin' there in that house . . . we's neighbors. 'N him black. It scared Effie. She knowed all about them blacks in the barracks there, dangerous, and al'ays readin' in the papers how they git drunk, a-hollerin' and knifin' up and murderin'. But not him — not Josh. Oh, no. He comes and offers that black hand. I took it — had to — it was only right. But not Effie. 'He's still black, Gus, he's still black,' she kept whisperin'. Then he got her good. He spoke-up and said right out that word she never expected from *no* black mouth: 'The niggers got bad names in these parts.' Yes, he said it — niggers — on account-a them in the barracks who make trouble every summer. But he's livin' here permanent, he says. He's makin' a home. He points there — the old Wilson house, twenty years empty, all old 'n boarded-up, but he cleaned her up. 'That's home,' he says. Effie didn't say 'He's still black' now — but lookin' wide at his hand in the air 'n back at the old Wilson house. 'He's livin' there,' she says to me. 'N then she says to him, 'You want coffee?' 'N leaves without no answer. Course he wants coffee. She knowed that, Effie did."

Then came Effie's touch, and her saying, "Hush, hush — " to him. And again she touched his elbow, that way in her face too she had of telling him he had said enough now.

Mister Furia nodded. For the littlest man had said it again: "Then it *is* him living there," only adding now, "it's been him all the time and nobody wised up to the fact that he was out here, too far outside the village limits to be noticed, while everybody was so sure he was living safe and sound in colored town."

What had Gus told them? He just didn't know. And he stopped, making the fat one put on a smile and thank him and ask him to go on: "So he is a good neighbor?"

But Gus could not answer with talkativeness now, for they had communicated the change to him. Even they were not experienced enough to cover up the discovery before him, old Gus, who had shown them which way the land lay. So their call was not now a social disguise, and they looked and talked without disguise when they saw he had shut up.

"Yes, he come when he had to," Gus replied.

They did not get mad. They did not have time to, because they held their anger jammed behind a concentration, with a kind of triumph, on the Wilson house beyond, that old house and the nigger inside.

III

But now — the second time — they were at Josh's forty minutes. It was the motor that told Effie the three men were finally leaving. She sat in her usual place, quiet as a monument in the window.

"Gone," she said.

Then she saw Josh coming across the fields, a big power of muscle, running, twenty-seven, never scared, not even looking scared — but running. He stopped with that stance strong with the look of independence, those long limbs, the same pride in him as when walking or just standing on his own land by his own house.

"What'd they say to you?" he asked Gus, his face lit with trouble and anger and resentment. But he did not wait.

"That's why I bought that eight-room house — to keep out of the rot and keep the rot out, to keep out of that downtown section too and help prove what we are. I should've stayed there and lived with my own kind and fought with them, not run away to read books in corners because I thought I could do something alone. I tricked myself maybe — that's what I did. And now they came again. They're like maggots crawling on dead meat. But now I've turned the tables on myself — and on them too — so I've got to stick it out and show them that no matter what they do, I can take it. I'll shown them what we are and what *they* are, so they'll know what they're up against in the long run."

He couldn't stop talking out the resentment turning to triumph, then anger, then resentment again, then all of them at once, too big to hold, like hot pourings out of him, even when running across that field, his strength violated by their insults, weakened by his own anger.

He went into the room after Gus, sweating anger.

"They want my house," he said. "My house!" His fist smashed onto the table, rattling pans and dishes. "Oh, at first he *said* for hire — just for hire. And the lie was clear on his face — just to see how it went with me. But I din't take it — "

"The house?" Gus said.

"Meetings — for Tradwohl and his little cabinet — for now and after the elections too, because he *will* be elected, he knows it, only he wants it guaranteed. They came to me wanting to make me as rotten. They work for my boss," Josh said. "Did you know that? Of course, you didn't. But they work for my boss, they let it slip out — or how would they know what I was doing? I didn't go to business college for nothing, and maybe I am black but that doesn't mean I'm black so that what's right is black too. I took notes. I saw what was going on, with my hand right on the records every day — Tradwohl's name there and all his credits, buying his way into the whole town so he *is* the whole town. I've got it in black and white. That's what they found out."

Rising, Effie said, "Sit down."

He sat, scarcely able to move in that kitchen with its too many chairs, relics of a big family that had gone long ago. He reached over the pan for the coffee Effie handed. She sat again, near to the closed door behind her, under the dairy calendar.

For a minute he felt comfort in the hot coffee and in this room he had got used to with its whole family album of photographs, yellow and older than these two people, pasted by a U. S. flag from a Sunday supplement and the newer black-and-

white photographs of two men, the one smiling through the dust on him and the one not smiling at all — and you could read through the dust *Ike* crudely penciled under the first.

"I paid for that job through an agency, and did it well too, not even suspecting what I'd gotten into — at first."

But he was glad it had happened. He kept thinking about the papers now. Keep them hidden away, he reminded himself every morning before he went off to the construction company. You may not be a clerk tomorrow. As soon as they get a man - in - the - know, a white man, you'll be gone.

He knew better than the men who gave them, what the looks meant: *a good job for a nigger even in these parts, a very good job for a nigger. Better than any nigger deserved.* Sometimes he heard them voice their assumptions as certainties. *Caldwell plays it safe. It's a good thing he lives in nigger town like the rest. If there's one safe place for niggers, it's nigger town.*

"You've got to promise me this," he said to Gus, "because I know they'll come back — for sure." Effie watched the road. "I don't know when, but they'll come."

That's how he told them about the papers.

"You've got to hide them," he urged, the violence deep in his voice. "They're hidden now."

"Hid?" Gus was by him, looking down. He looked very feeble, and his face dumb.

"They're more important than my whole life now," he told Gus. "If anything happens, you must see that they are mailed quickly but in secret — when it's safe. My friend's address is on the box. Nobody here will know him but he's in the law and he'll know what to do. The address is inside the box too. A tin box."

"Where?"

Josh could smile at that, for Gus had not questioned for a moment what was in the box. He would do it never knowing that every slip of paper Josh could get his hands on to tear down the mountain of Tradwohl was there, in copy or original.

"There — under the back stoop. They'll never find them there behind the blocks."

The stoop.

He rose and went to the doorway. With his back toward them, he looked at the stoop.

"I came here like the rest to pick potatoes — the first time I ever really knew the ground. Do you know, I had never really seen it before —or the sea. I walked to the Point once. I got there at night and the moon was a path clear up to the sky, out on the water. I stood on the sand and I said, Everything is dead. In the whole world I'm the only thing, I, Joshua Wells Caldwell. Then the beacon threw its light out, as if it was for me. You know? I think I knew where I wanted to be — on this island. I guess I thought I might be the first of a whole line, sooner or later marry one of those girls from town or maybe bring one home from the city. And someday they'd sit on that cement stoop I set down myself, and tell how their great-grandfather who set that cement bought this house in 1958. Understand, Mister Edwards? So I could feel I lived on this sand pile of an island and left something on it that would go on without me."

Restlessly his eyes covered walls and objects, as if searching again for what there was in that room and in those two old people no one would ever know or hear about or care

about, living in a room nobody would even keep a dog in.

"I'm going back," he said, tired, sweating out impatience and urgency.

Effie formed the word on her lips, but they froze there. She knew he would not stay despite the asking. He went out, back down the furrows, tall on the horizon, with slow, long strides.

"That boy, he knows everything. How come he knows, Effie — and him not born here?"

"It's not bein' born here," she said. "I'm thinkin' it's how he is."

For a long time Effie could see Josh sitting on the back stoop. Beyond, fronting the house, the black road cut like the bed of an empty river into the horizon.

She got up to light the oil lamp.

Long Row, she thought. She could not even imagine the beachside empty of the family, of all the old families.

An hour later she put the lamp out for the night. In the unrelieved darkness the light in the Wilson house glared its still beacon.

And in bed, in the early hours, she noted the wind had changed, because the back door kept up its constant, fidgety rattling.

IV

All the windy morning, tenaciously, Gus worked, first chipping enough kindling ahead, then trying to rewire the coop. It was almost noon when Effie, wrapped in a light coat, came out. He saw first her skirt and then the cluster of last pansies in her hand hung close against her long skirt. He stopped working, rose gruntily, patting his sleeve.

"Hot. I'm sweatin'."

"Gus . . . The sun, it was on the window."

"It's on it every mornin' there is sun," he said, and as proof indicated — "It's on there now," almost laughing, but not daring — because before his hand could quite reach out to show her, he saw her face, searching, turn on him again with that look, bleak as the sounding wind.

"That's not sun. The sun's overhead. It's most noon, Gus."

He squinted, coming to full height. "What?"

"The light. Josh's kitchen light." And in explanation she said, "It was bright outside this mornin'. The bright woke me up early. Josh wouldn't need light. He gits up late."

"Gus — ?" she said, as if there were too much silence from him.

He got up and went to the edge of the lawn, with a step in him of something that was not Gus, life long-gone and dimly remembered. He stood making an eye-search of the Wilson house.

There were no trees on the Wilson land, nothing to break the still sight longer than dust-puffs from the bald lawn, sudden visible coughs over the horizon momentarily fogging the outline of the house. Then it was a still, aged outcrop, violating sky and earth with a stern, granite stillness.

He left Effie there and went stepping firmly, steady as time, across the field.

Soon he disappeared into the house as part of the stillness. She saw the light go out. Her skirts beat up sound around her. Defiantly, she waited for his sign in all that wind.

After — ten minutes perhaps — not that long, he came out onto the stoop, looking over the long ground

at her. He stepped off and bending under the stoop, extracted with some difficulty an object, which she knew must be the tin box. Josh's death sign.

He's writ his own fun'ral, she thought. He's dead.

Gus came quickly, stumbling. Consciously, she turned away toward the house, knowing everything but *how* it happened. But Gus would tell it, not from desire to say it but need to understand it himself, because in eighty years of living he had seen little of bloodletting or violence or murder that could not be understood — and often forgiven — but there were other times —

He came up behind.

"He's all cut up, it's not Josh no more, ya can't tell, only it's black 'n all blood-red so's — "

The gullies of red were still in his sight, and there was too much tumbling in him to hold it up to her in words; and the metallic rattle of the case he dropped on the table brought him to an immediate halt. He sat down, twitching, and without resting rose again, seizing the box. She followed him out to the shed and, instructed by his silent hands, she packed almost a crateful of egg boxes. He opened the tin box and took out the second address, the duplicate, then set the box down into the crate and packed the egg boxes disguisingly around it. Then he nailed the crate. On the bench he laboriously copied the address. Afterwards he carried it across the lawn to the edge of the road for the night pick-up.

"I'm goin' to town," he told her. Not since the last election, since two years ago, had he said that. Without words he left her.

But before a quarter-hour was up she heard the motor stop out front. She rose, seizing the rifle from the kitchen corner and went out back, attentive. She held it ready. The drone of the car went downwind again. And his figure came back toward the house. She settled the rifle by her side, as if she had known he would not leave her.

"Hailed a car. I told 'm. They'll send the police."

"Most got ya'self shot dead," she said.

V

It made the late edition of the paper the same day — after the police and newsmen and the idlers had haunted the Wilson house. But it did not make headlines — only a small corner column on the front page:

NEGRO HACKED TO DEATH IN OWN HOME

Joshua Caldwell, 27-year-old Negro, was found dead this morning in the kitchen of his home on the North Road. The body was found and identified by Caldwell's neighbor, Gus Edwards. Edwards had been attracted to the house by the sight of the kitchen light burning. Edwards said the light never burned in the morning. It made his sister, Effie Edwards, curious, Edwards reported. At approximately noon he went to the house, part of the former Wilson estate, and found the body mutilated by knives almost beyond recognition.

Caldwell was an employee of the Tradwohl Construction Company and a native of New York City before purchasing the Wilson estate. He is survived by no

known relatives. Caldwell was a member of the Central Christian Foundling Home of New York City.

It is believed the murder may have some connection with the chain of Negro slashings which have occurred on Eastern Long Island throughout the summer. Police have as yet no positive clues as to the possible identity of the killer. The grounds are restricted while under investigation.

An' they'll find nothin', not yet, Gus thought, the egg crate by the road still solid in his sight.

"I wanted to tell 'm about the men," he told Effie. "But Josh — he kept comin' back to me. All the police 'n the newsfellas — ya don't know who to trust no more. I wanted to tell young Cash the cop too, I knowed his father, but I didn't do it."

Sometimes his eyes settled on the Wilson house. Day was edging down beyond, and the dark over it. The house was pitch in the sun deep behind, making the sky crimson and a hollow shell over it.

"I'm all right, Gus." She lit the paper under the wood, put the lid on and set out the water kettle.

"Yes," he said.

Outside a motor came down the road, and she held her words. It slowed, going past the Wilson house, then it accelerated by. "Idlers." Gus could scarcely hear anything — only see it on her face.

"Effie — ?"

"It's all right, Gus."

This time her old wrinkled face wrinkled more, broadening, and he could tell the smile on it.

"They won't come back — in the daytime."

"Who — ?" But she knew. "No," she added.

"It's 'cuz they knowed somethin' happ'ned when they didn't find the box. They'll come."

He didn't look at her.

"Effie?"

" — at night," she said for him.

"Yes."

Already the kitchen was heavy with gray and shadow, so when she moved past windows she was an unclear shadow too. The pans on the stove began to merge. In the stove the fire ringed a flighty red glow around the two lids and quivered them upon the ceiling; and on the walls the dustladen photographs went into the dusk. Still, both knew, with the least movement, what to touch, that it was there, had always been there.

"Tea?" she said, pouring before he answered. His clouds of pipe smoke made gray rushes over the walls.

They heard the motor letting up as it drew close to the house and almost stopped directly in front; but another came distinctly into sound, and the first started again and went on.

"What time, Effie?"

"Five past seven," she said hurriedly. A door banged and she heard then the dropping of the crate in the truck, "It's Jim," she said. "He came."

Gus stepped out to wave him in, but he saw the other car, off the road, distantly, its light curving back now. And Jim was driving off . . .

"Effie — ?" he called through the screen.

The two lights appeared, distant but distinct, and came down the dark.

"Leave the light burning," he said. He could see the two full coffee cups shimmering in the oil light.

"Effie?"

"It's all right, Gus," she said, handing out the rifle.

He turned, listening to the sound like a voice over the land, and the sea beating against the night shores. Steady, he raised the rifle at the instant the car lights came up on the lawn and flashed the night away.

Georgetown, 1958

● **Riley Hughes**

Undergraduates now park their cars
where, it is said,
George Washington once looped the reins
about a post, then came to tea
and looked the length of granite nose
upon a nephew doing well
with the rational curriculum.

A towered building turns its hybrid back
upon the eighteenth-century close,
where flowers grow, and grass erupts
between time-softened bricks
to march towards the steps
where Lafayette and (so much later) Marshal Foch
spoke to young gentlemen now long since dispersed.

Now as then
men robed to time in timeless black
walk back and forward
breathing prayer downward to the page
that first surrendered it.
While time, unnoted *tertium quid,* slides onward
to keep sedate appointment with
the next impalpable
event.

Norse Song

● **Brother D. Adelbert, F.S.C.**

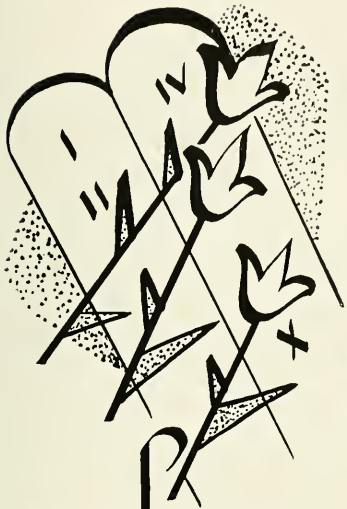
A weird net have I,
A web of magic fingers,
Woven of the glint-hair of the ice-witch,
Knotted by the grim craft
Of elder spiders.

The leprechaun
In the dale of the Bann
By the wick of Coleraine,
The troll cobbler
Of the slim daughter of Antrim,
Him shall I catch
In his tapping.

I shall mind the measure
Of her cork-heeled slipper
In the hand of the squirming gremlin.
Then shall he spickly sew
With his silver awl
One smidge of hair,
One thread from my crafty net,
In the toe of her slipper,
The left slipper.

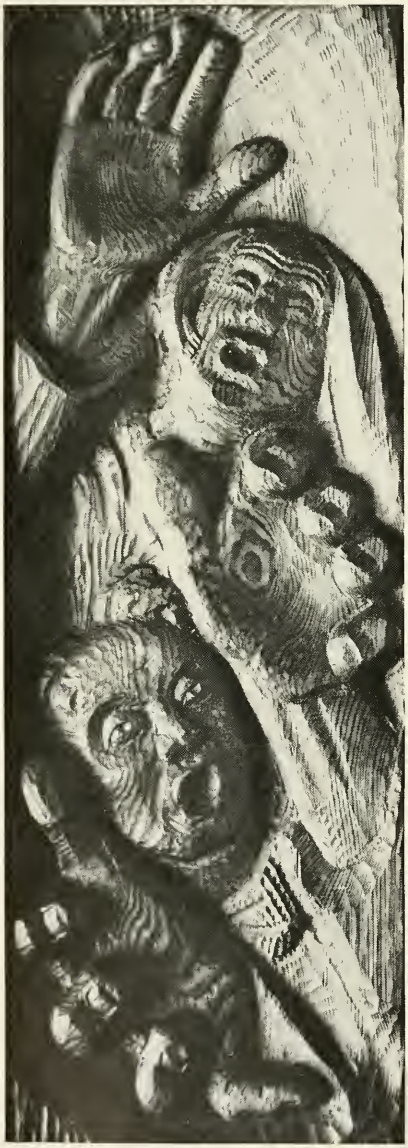
So, with the moon at her back,
She of the keel-black hair
And ivory arms
Shall come,
Skipping to the slick cove,
Dancing the floss to my ship —
Skimmer Dragon.

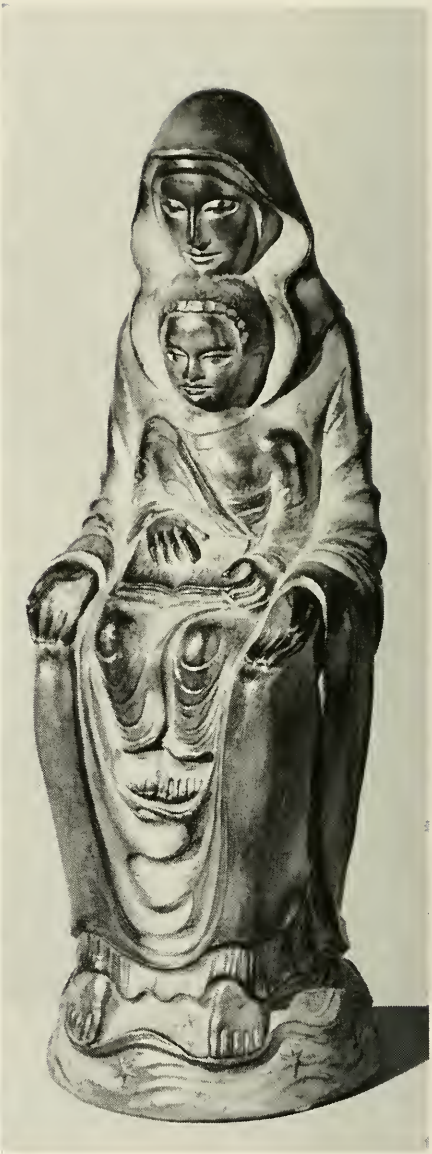
The jarl spiders
Of Reykjavik
Shall warm their brittle joints
In corners beneath our bed.
My web of witch's hair,
The charmed net,
Shall I grant them,
When, with threadings of wisdom,
Twelve sealskin slippers
They shape her.



Happy are they whose way is blameless who walk in the law of the LORD ∴ Ps. 118.

SEAT OF WISDOM →
This terra cotta Madonna and Child was especially designed by Ade Bethune for Mary's Gardens, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.





← LORD, THAT WE MAY SEE
Reverend Anthony Lauck, C.S.C., carved this relief panel in redwood. It is now installed in the Retreat House of St. Joseph-in-the-Hills, Malvern, Pennsylvania.

Possessed

● **Emilie Glen**

ENDRE *here!* That bird of paradise coming here to jukebox, billboard America! Endre Zoltan with his Prague custom-mades (whenever his family could get their artist to the fitters), his vests varied as his palette, his grandfather's gold-headed cane, the gift of the Emperor Franz Joseph.

My wife flattened the letter, written on sketch paper, the thrust of practice lines crossed by wayward handwriting.

"Endre lived a life of such privilege in pre-Nazi Prague that it *would* take a World War II to beach him, first in England, now here in New York. His father lost a fortune after the collapse of the monarchy, but partially regained it as an industrialist in the new Czech state, and Endre married into an even greater fortune, a Jewish woman who died in England soon after the war. They were intimate friends of Chagall, Kafka, Segovia, Karsavina, many greats."

"Any children?"

"No — no children. Endre and I were students together in Milan. I never saw anyone so careless of possessions. Most of the time he was poorer than we were because he was always losing his wallet, travelers checks, passport, keys, hat, overcoat, anything pawnable; but, with the brush, he never lost the power of a stroke. He was careless of everything but his canvas."

"Come, tell me the rest in the kitchen. I've got to start the potatoes baking."

"Think of it! Endre Zoltan teaching a class in my little art school. His paintings hang in Prague's National Gallery."

Laura knelt to the oven, raising the flame to rivulets that blued the silver foil about the Idahoes, the moment of Endre's coming fixed in minute peaks and pockets of silver blue light.

"You have quite a reputation yourself, Myles, more portrait sittings than you can handle, plenty of students."

"Proves you can be a serious artist and stay in the middle tax brackets, but Endre is great."

Laura scraped a fast carrot; the orange shavings falling to the white sink could have been from Endre's explosive palette. "Then why has he never been heard of outside Prague?"

"Before Anschluss, he was becoming a name."

"It could be money and influence that won him his awards."

"I saw his work. I know. And you don't buy your way into the National Gallery. The only thing influence did for him was to keep him in the army when he was such a loss as a soldier they didn't know what to do with him. He was caught using the Commandant's latrine when they shunted him to an office siding. He'd be the only soldier left dreaming in the middle of the square after a State ceremony. Still he fought the fascists so strenuously

that one of the first places the Nazis searched on entering Prague was his studio. He was as careless of his life as of anything else, but he had to get his Jewish wife out of the country or he would have worked in the underground like his sister and brother-in-law, both murdered by the Nazis. He lost everything, all his money, possessions; arrived in England with only twelve francs in his pocket; and now at fifty-two he is beginning again here."

"I was thinking —." Laura left off her magenta nailed gouging out of the green pepper seeds. "Why not save him rent by letting him sleep in the back room at the studio? He could take messages, make appointments."

"Wouldn't count on him for such practicalities, but I'd like him to live and paint in the studio, and what a teacher he'll be in flashes. Think of it — Endre — Endre Zoltan!

"Tropical fish —."

"What do you mean, tropical fish?"

"Mines and depth charges have driven some strange and wonderful fish to our waters. How does he paint — what *ist* — what *ism*?"

"No school, he's his own school. His sure brush — his color emergence — color as capsules exploding to his forms, his intent. Dead space never weights his works; it leaps from tension to tension, rhythms the whole. In a gallery of canvases, the Zoltan style is unmistakable. It comes up out of what he has to paint, how he sees — feels. That is, if he is as I remember. He may have gone on past my knowing."

Endre knelt on the floor of his studio room, knelt as protectively to his crate of belongings as his grandfather had knelt to his land.

"Not much of a room for sleeping," I said, "but a real studio for working."

"Vhat I have left fills only a very little room."

The costly art books were too big for the book shelf. With fingers that could hold the brush to moth-wing strokes, he touched the color plates as if they were bruisable petals. "Books floor to ceiling, I leave behind in Praha. Everything built in, ve have to leave. Such a pride of the architect, that house. He was always asking my permission to come in and show his style; photographers vanted to take pictures. Murals, Chagall do special for me; walls of damask, embossed leather, wallpaper designed by Kandinsky — all I lose."

Endre reached a silver case out of his vest pocket, a brocaded vest, its antique gold blunted by many cleanings. His elegant custom-made had stood up to the years. His looks had stood up to them, too. He was older by intensity — scorched white hair, all the fiercer in its receding; high-bridged nose, coin of a realm; short chin, his ancestors would have strengthened with a beard; the mouth soft set. But when he turned, fixed his grey eyes on you, or rather, fixed space, worked thrusts and tensions, depthed planes to volumes, you could no longer take him apart feature by feature. You saw only his seeing.

"I save nothing except one or two mementoes, this leetle watch my wife's father give it to her." He fingered its silver fiercely, opened it to the dial. "It vass covered by leather, no silver showing. All I lose. I touch with my mind's touch — every wrinkle in my leather desk set, the scar in the wood of my wife's Beckstein, the worn spot in the otter collar of my greatcoat. I feel with a bit-

terness. All I lose. A bad joke of my grandfather's, maybe, for our indifference to his land."

Endre bent to his travel case, the rich-odored leather giving off a brown pollen, its leanness girt by a swashbuckling belt from the free days. "The money we leave in the banks. I try to save it. I take some of it out, I mail it in envelopes. I do what I can. Like your Confederate money, it has value only as collage. One time it would have bought mansions, now, not so much as a lawn mower. My gallery lost — the Caravaggios, the Van Eyck, the Vermeer, the Monets, Cezannes — my wife's great collection, her father's, her father's father's."

Endre talked in our tongue with an eloquence that promised well for his art lectures. A heavy accent, words here and there difficult to make out, at a loss for some words, but he spoke with such distinctness, such cadence, that his meanings were all the clearer for the need to listen intently. A puzzling accent with his *leetle* and *tween* as if he had learned his English from the French.

"I reesk my life bringing a parcel out of Czecho-Slovakia. I don't know vhat is in it; I don't ask. It is for my friend Fritzie. His mother geeve it to me with tears. Life depends on getting it through, I theenk. And you know vhat is in it? Six bands for the evening shirt. A world gone in blood, and she knows only Fritzie must have his evening shirts all whitely ironed."

He unpacked a portfolio of his work. "From student days," he said. "My wife salvaged it by leaving things she needed behind."

"Wish I had that study of hands — ." In my reaching toward it, he shrank back toward the wall, hugging the portfolio to him and shaking his head against giving it up even to a glance.

"Any recent work? Did you have time to paint in England?"

"Not much. I finish nothing. I vork hard, labor with my hands, get my back into it, anything to keep alive. When I line up for a job, they say they have nothing for me. I say, 'Vhat do you vant us to do? Go back to the Nazis?' But I do not look back; I turn into no pillar of salt."

Endre's teaching was wayward as his hat, a green faded fedora highlighting his burnt sienna skin tones, the only hat he had ever hung onto. He wore it backwards, forwards, brim down in back, semi-up in front.

His step around the studio was a bounding from idea to idea, not the step he used to have, spring-arched as a *pas de chai*, more cautious, perhaps, from walking the mined beaches of England. He would slide in and out of the rows of painters, swing his brush like a baton, a Roman candle, as he used the error of one student as a point of departure for a speech, all light and motion like the mobile above his head. But when the class assembled for his lecture, he would talk textbook and walk out before the hour to track some private sale or auction.

His insults overworked the tear ducts of our more tender students, sent others off in a rage. "Another lost pupil," I said to him, "a rich one," after he told the desperately corseted Mrs. Garfin, 'You paint with your back sides.' "You're not teaching genius nor even talent. Just give them the rudiments."

"I'm sick of teach rich women from Great Neck; they don't vant to paint; they vant to say they paint.

They live greedy little lives, but they vant everybody to think they give, create. They sin; they know they sin, but those water colors, they will wash them clean. Oh, I don't know vhat I say. I go out, buy something — more art books. I tell myself, 'Endre, you cannot afford such expensive books. But I buy."

"You won't even be buying bread if you can't tolerate rich women from Great Neck."

"And the portraits — they don't want the truth of their faces, let alone their souls.

"I know — I know. I behave — ."

Great Neck had it better for almost a month. Then Endre told a neurotic private pupil, "I don't run a sanitorium. This is not a psychiatrist's couch; it's an art school."

Endre, as a difficult teacher, I might expect; but Endre, neglecting his canvases to go off on collector's quests, that was more Great Neck than Endre. In our walks he would gaze into shop windows to the depth of their sun rays, lost in old Staffordshire, Royal Meissen, a length of silvered wallpaper, a bolt of rose brocade, Danish figurines, snow blue, a Bohemian glass decanter. He would stand before a great chandelier, mirrored to the red and green underglass of low hanging bells, and look deeper than the window to a grand palace of prism light.

Sometimes he would go into the shops along Madison Avenue — custom-mades, imported shirtings, leather to smell, touch, all but the travel cases. He turned from them. In Franz Joseph elegance, an umbrella substituting for the gold-headed cane, he would approach a decorator, talk in terms of finishing a suite down to the door stops, and leave with some small purchase, or a "think it over."

"Don't you see vhy I haunt shops and auctions? My own things could appear out of nowhere. It happens."

"You used to be careless of things. Remember the trail of vests you left across the continent, the cigarette cases, lighters, cuff links? Now you even hang onto your umbrella."

"Then I have — how is it? — like a pressing tumor. I must possess even the unpossessable. The quivering bows of a symphony orchestra — I want to reach out, gather them all in. I could scoop up the light bulbs at Times Square by the basketful. I collect stupid things, bits of tin foil. My pockets bean bag with scraps, empty match books."

His open gestures were now hoarding, the thumb cradled in the closed hand. "Once before, I feel like this, as a little fellow. Things weren't going too well with my Mother and Father. They talk only of vhat they lose, vhat they cannot afford. I collect match boxes with bright pictures, dreadful but gay, the lid sliding out to waxy neat rows of matches, their tiny heads bright. I still think is a pretty sight. Maybe I choose painting in the first place to have a palette loaded with all colors, rows of brushes, canvas stretched tight and sure."

"Collect shrunken heads, elks' teeth, anything, as long as you stay with your painting. As soon as you're ready to exhibit, I've interested several dealers."

"Don't rush me, Myles. I have trouble — how is it? — acclimate? — to acclimate. I start paintings, but they are not finished."

His brush was busy after our talk. He laid it down less often to go out to auctions and shop windows.

Student days I used to watch his swift brush for the secret of his

spatials, his fusion of stroke and color. Now his tight-held brush hoarded his color strokes. At my coming forward he stood between me and the canvas. "Please, not until I finish."

His brush was lizard from canvas to canvas until the finished piled up like another of his collections. Already he was collecting picture frames, trying them against the unfinished canvases. To get him to work, to finish, I set a definite date to show his paintings to Mr. Garand of the Krauss-Stevens Gallery. A one-man exhibit at this gallery would open many others.

The months till May, he closed the doors of the back studio against all watching. I could hear him in there, his rubber soles screeching in a back and forth to the canvas, hear him talking self-instruction the way he used to in Milan against all our shouts for quiet.

A couple of weeks before the appointment with Mr. Garand I asked, "How about a preview?"

"Finish, finish — all I hear — finish. The sittings you put off on me. They are what you call finish. I take them."

"No — no. They're virtuoso, from the top of your head — the technique, I mean, not the seeing. Mr. Garand will want to see your experimental work."

"Experimental — vhat is that but never finish? Do you know how long Ghiberti vork on his bronze gates of paradise? Twenty years — each figure he sketch, sketch, sketch, and still he could sketch some more. Degas, he never finish, beating his clay down and down and down. A friend bought a painting of his. Degas came to see, and when his friend turn his head, Degas made off with it to work some more. After that, his friend chained the picture to the wall."

"Maybe so — but there comes a time when you must call a painting finished enough to let it go. Mr. Garand will lose interest. Exciting young painters are battering at his door. I can't keep dealer interest alive forever."

"It's the vork of art, not the artist. You think I bow down to such painting by a great name? No, I judge the individual canvas. I am not trying to hang the walls with many works. I am vorking — I vork."

"But judging by the unfinished, they are not like you."

"Not like me then — is like me now — ."

"No, Endre — they're not like you. They are static as Vuillard's closed in rooms. They're — well, they're cut flowers."

"Vhat do you try to say? I'm feenished? I dig my grave, and do not lie down in it? I know, war has many ways to kill. There are more dead than ever lie down in their graves."

He set a new canvas on his easel, worked faithfully to its finish, but it was cut flowers.

"I don't feel what is here to paint — waterfronts, skyscrapers, gum stuck sidewalks, cathedraled juke boxes. What do you vant, another New World Symphony that is really mittel Europa? I feel the red-tiled roofs of Praha, the soot painted stone, the sunset beyond Charles Bridge, red as Bohemian glass."

"Then paint your feeling for Prague."

"Oh, no — I turn into no pillar of salt."

The idea of an entire presentation, a portfolio of paintings for an art dealer to consider, might have over-

whelmed Endre. "One painting," I said to him, "finish just one, and enter it for the Condon award." As I looked again through the canvases, I had to say, "Start one you will want to finish." He worked; he stayed in from auctions, the shop windows; he stayed painting.

"I not show you until it is finish," he said to me even up to the week it must be entered.

"Now I call it finish," he said after shutting himself in almost twenty-four hours. I stepped forward to exclaim, stopped to puzzle. It could have been someone else's work — a study in sumptuous materials, Flemish jewel tones like oil and egg emulsion, and, over all, the red-raying light of a Bohemian glass casque.

"So it's not Endre," he said to me. "Still I have to paint it. I have to what you call feenish."

"Superbly painted for a Van Eyck, but I don't think it has a chance of winning the Condon award. That red glass, the blood shine. Well, who knows about an art jury?"

Students stomped out at Endre's insults; customers refused his portraits, threatened law suits. "Endre, we can't stay in business like this," I said to hunched shoulders, head sunk to a magnifying glass as he examined a detail from an enameled snuff box. "You won't be able to collect many more of those if you keep losing your customers."

With the snuff box becoming a collection of snuff boxes, with custom-mades and mounting bills, he still spoke up, painted down. But for every student who stomped out carrying the legend of his ferocity, there came to this teacher who demands genius in each stroke so many that we had to turn them away. He could ask any price for private lessons. His truthtraits became such a parlor thrill that he had to limit his sittings, and the fewer he could take, the louder the clamor; and, if he didn't feel like finishing a portrait, they would accept what truth there was of themselves.

"No matter," he said, when his painting was returned without award, and he went on fingering his cuff links on their racks as lovingly as he used to finger tubes of paint.

Endre, the free loser, was leaving his belongings around again, lighters, cigarette cases, wallets. He carried bills loose in every pocket. His stock broker had invested his earnings so cleverly that he could afford his own studio apartment on Central Park South in an old building with high ceilinged rooms and an iron wrought balcony old-world enough to look down on the red-tiled roofs, the cobblestoned streets of Prague.

As his books rose from floor to ceiling, as his built-ins, papering and paneling took on the elegance of his lost house, as his collection of paintings began to bloom under fluorescence, he became careless of collecting, left it to his decorator, his friends.

A March twilight softening to April, he caught up with me as I started across Columbus Circle after class. "I paint something I am ready to let go," he said. "Come and see."

We walked through wet streets paletting neon colors, Endre careless of the traffic signals, the flashing WALK, DON'T WALK. We managed to reach the marbled entrance to his building, rode the big old elevator, its wrought iron open to the tiled shaft.

"Oh, the key. I shut it up in the house, or leave it at the studio, or

lose altogether. Vait," he said to the elevator man who was already getting out his passkey as a matter of routine. "After this I do not lock the door. Keys are a big nuisance; they lock you in, lock you out."

His entrance hall was chandeliered to prismatic light. Spring arched to his old walk as he went on through his study with the black diamond panes, Bohemian glass, and leather fittings; but I stayed back to look at the work of his countryman above the desk, one of Kokoschka's early works.

"Come," he called. "Come see."

In the good smell of oils and turpentine, the studio was bare of everything but work, cleared of the unfinished clutter. I looked up to the skylight in evening amethyst, looked everywhere but at the outsize canvas across two easels, blinked it to a whirl of color. I had seen artists do it before in desperation at ebbing creativeness, cover the wall with a work startling only in size.

"What is this? When I tell you I am not finish, you cannot look fast enough. Now I tell you — is finish — you look everywhere but here." He stood beside his canvas, both hands out to it. "Now it is how I want it. I have to be easy in the mind. Come on — come on, look — ." He used his hands like a conductor's to lift me to the moment.

Before me — living canvas — the color, ripe grain for the eye to harvest; the relentless rhythms of the brush strokes leading within and within to the release of the picture in full, a city never finished, always building. Steel girders rise out of rhythmed depths; welding sparks fountain about sinewed workers, men and men and men in parallel lines to infinity.

"I become — " he searched through his pockets for his lighter, found it nesting silver in his vest pocket — "you say it how? — acclim — acclimated."

The Night is an Ocean

● **Charles Angoff**

The night is
An ocean
Without waves.

The night is
The other side
Of eternity.

The night is
The long doubt
Of creation,
The pause of
History.

The night is
The invisible smile
Of infinity.

Strangers in the Night

● **Jocelyn Macy Sloan**

Strangers' voices murmured around the island
after the islanders slept.
No wind stirred. Waves were the source
of crystalline, shell-muted voices;
as though, rocking leisurely
upon hammocks of the sea,
they lay. Who were they?
Who knows — ?

But they talked all night together,
amusedly together.
I heard; and there wasn't a moon
to encourage daftness in mortals —
not the sign of one.

Mount the Color of Heaven

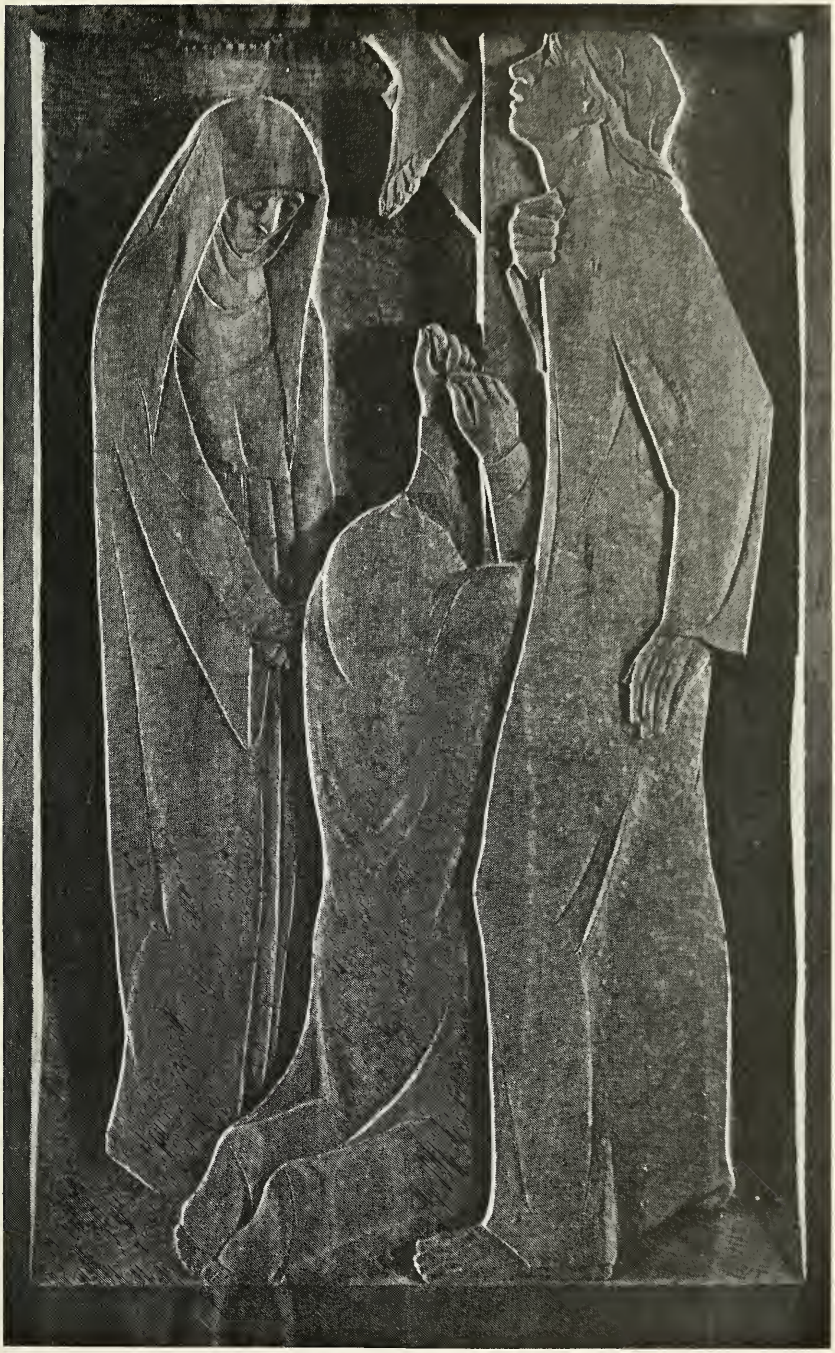
● **Irma Wassall**

In a still T'ang tomb so deep no sound
of hell on earth can ever reach it,
a blue horse, a horse the color of Heaven,
waits with a white saddle empty on his back
to carry on celestial errands
his princely master dead a thousand years.
And the blue horse waits in vain:
The prince's head
lies on the pillow of rest eternal,
and never will be lifted up again.

Bend your head, O horse, with your arched neck
pavonated like a pigeon's in the sun,
and the creamy corded mane.
Bend your head until it touches your gilded hooves,
O horse, requesting of the gods
your master sleep in peace forever;
and carry another, weary of shedding tears,
to a place where can be found
a pillow of rest eternal.

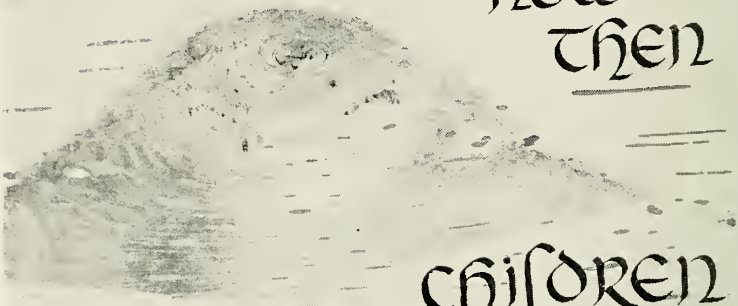
ON GOLGOTHA →

A six-foot bas-relief which has been shown, by invitation, in several national exhibitions: The Contemporary Religious Art Show at Brooks Memorial Gallery in Memphis, Tennessee; "Religion and Man in Contemporary Art" at Washington Cathedral, Washington, D. C.; and in the Christocentric Arts Festival at the University of Illinois, Champaign, Illinois.



...it is innocence that
is full and experience
that is empty
it is innocence that
wins and experience
that loses.....

NOW
THEN



CHILDREN

go to school: and you men,
go to the school of LIFE...
go and LEARN
how to UNLEARN.

from "God Speaks"
by Charles Péguy

This Side the Fog

● **Elizabeth Bartlett**

1.

Windless season without rain
You bring the sea up from the rocks
Across the cliffs, drifting clouds

Gray weaves the night as day
And everything moves like sleep

Trees climb a hill, lights swing
Upon circles of darkness
Walls bend a road where you trespass

You are the mover, the essence
Of all things seen and unseen

Windless you go and rainless
Without form, color or motion
In you all time is one

Fog or shadow of God maybe
Who walks and whispers so close to me?

2.

Here on the shore's last link
Against the landscape dream
I stand listening

Intangible as air
And yet like mesh, a web
Winds strands about my head

I can not see or hear
Beyond the moment's rim
That holds me to this pier

Only a sixth sense
Of faith or fear, whatever's meant
Sways in the balance

3.

Blind as a crab in the sand
Waiting for the tide to slack
I feel through my hands blank

Knowing nothing that they can not reach
Yet groping to believe these
Signs of emptiness real

Ground, sea, sky, all are merged
In the surrounding surf
Where everything's reversed

Where breath is radar to itself
Antennaed to gray silence
And only I move, nothing else

4.

Beyond the eye's threshold
A light swings in the door
Blurred by the wind and blown

Like smoke across the dunes
For ghosts who wander through
In search of missing clues

Dimly they turn and return
Gathering broken sherds
They reefed against the world

Each sorting out his own
To piece the shells into a whole
And find the echo lode

5.

Through the porthole of my mind
Memory ships oars and glides
Into the sea outside

Whose hand was on the tiller
What buoy marked the shoals or
Whether there was another

I do not know. A hazy twilight
Lay over the gray water and I
Heard the distant horn of time

Blow once or twice in warning
While seagulls squatted on the beach
Windless without wings

And I thought, will it be like that
On the coast of my setting, mast
And sun obscured by fact?

6.

Above the shore a lone train
Tolls the night, slowing its race
To a throttled brake

As a hand plows the mist
To draw a moving bridge
Across the mainland's tip

O magnetic eye that signals
When human daylight fails
And all's invisible

Who guides the current, the flow
Of water, air and pole
What dragon's head node?

Low Requiem

● **Katherine Brégy**

Go, set a candle decently at the feet of love,
And another at his head:
For he who held the sweetness and the swiftness and the strength
Of all the world in his breath
Is most indubitably dead.
And I, standing in meticulous mourning by his bier,
Believe the last word is said.
His hand, that was made for all caresses,
Will not bless any more.
His eyes, that looked unafraid into the flaming face of life,
Are as a barricaded door . . .
But shall not the memory of him, in two shuttered hearts,
Return with the spring rains wistfully forevermore?

An Old Gourd

● **Lewis Turco**

And it was right that he should go,
silvered years
hanging from him like
silk from corn.

But that is where
the simile ends: he was no more
like a firm ear of kernels
than pumpkins are like artichokes.

Rather, he was an old gourd,
wrung out and dry as last
September; if
he *was* a little plump,
it was merely skin.

It was right for him
to go that way, as everyone
remembered him, expecting him
to do it every year.

But every year he'd wait
to see another autumn
before he did it.

Then, when autumn came,
he'd be so pleased he'd wait
till it was over and
it was too late.

This year we saw him in the fields
as usual,
walking through the yellow stalks,
and in the orchards, on his
hands and knees
among the windfalls.

The day he went, I saw him in
his garden — he'd not bothered
to collect the peas; the cabbages

were wry and withered; the frost had even
bitten the weeds and dried
them out.

I saw him pause and start,
wander aimlessly along as though
something were puzzling or
bothering him.

And then he stopped
before the scarecrow, looked it in
its shattered eyes, and shook its sleeve
like shaking hands.

Of Prophecy

● **Sister M. Maura, S.S.N.D.**

Color drawing in the Lambeth Bible, 12 c.

"And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, a flower shall rise up out of his root."

Caught in the spidery foliage of marginals
locked in the wheels of testament idiom,
prophets and kings with garments loose as rain

and scrolls unwinding like forgotten spools
thrust their collocated fingers toward fulfillment.
Justice (with her scales) and Peace kiss

each other; Mercy (with her pots of oil)
and Truth clasp hands. The lady of the Synagogue
(veiled) walks with Moses (horned) and Abraham.

And Jahveh thrusts His hand from out the page
to lift her veil that she may see. Nimbused
with a crown, Lady Church is served by Paul and Peter.

And like a great pile sunk in a riverbed
the rod comes out of Jesse prostrate on
the ebullient undergirding tracery.

The rod grows to Virgin (joy is young)
and from her flowers a bright arc of Isaian doves
about the Lord. The Lord of Lords.

Line and blur, butterfly tenacity of tendril
interlocking tendril, vernacular of color,
semantics of shadowing instruct the mind

to assiduous flesh divinely bought,
while scraped vellum crumbles and colors cry
incarnation from flaking impermanence.

Matty

● Robert A. Wiggins

IT WAS hot, and Matty paused in her work to wipe her sweaty face on a flour-sack apron tied around her middle. It was only about eleven in the morning, but a yellow Georgia sun beat down on the hard clay backyard outside, and already the chickens that normally pecked and scratched there were huddled in the shade with their beaks apart, their throats working as though they could not breathe. It was hotter in the kitchen under the galvanized iron roof.

Matty shuffled barefoot between the wood range and the open screen door where it was less hot. Framed in the doorway, her stringy, tired body showed stark through her only garment, a sleeveless faded cotton dress. She mopped her face again with her apron and pushed strands of graying hair back out of the way behind her ears.

"Ain't you through with them butterbeans yet?" she asked someone out on the porch.

"Just a minute," she was answered by the voice of a young girl.

Matty went back to the stove and removed the lid from a boiling pot of water. With an iron spoon she dipped up several chunks of side meat and inspected them. She was followed in the kitchen by a young girl whose age could not accurately be guessed. She was dressed like her mother in only a single garment, but it fit her ripe figure more closely. Judging by her full breasts and rounded thighs outlined against the damp cotton of her dress, one might say she was eighteen or twenty years old. But her face seemed little more than that of a child. Her sun-bleached hair was short and combed away from her lightly freckled face; she habitually held her lips slightly parted in a half-smile, and her eyes stared candidly at the world.

She carried a pan of freshly shelled lima beans over to the stove and, at a sign from the older woman, dumped them into the boiling pot. Matty put the lid on and then pointed to a bucket standing on the bench by the door.

"Go git a fresh bucket of water from the well so your Paw can have a cool drink when he comes in."

Matty set about mixing a dough with her hands, working yellow cornmeal with water and salt into a stiff batter. She shaped several flat pones the size of her hand and placed them side by side in two large pans. It was awful hot, she thought. The cow sure took a good time to go dry. Her milk would be hard to keep in this kind of weather, and she would be fresh and have calf meat about the time summer greens played out and turnips and collards would be running low. The calf would tide them over so they would not have to go into the hog meat too early like the year before when Paw took it into his head to sell the calf for some ready cash.

Paw talked encouraging about switching from cotton to tobacco this year, but Matty could not share his

optimism. She could not believe it was more than a changing of evils. Instead of boll weevils or drought or late rain spoiling the cotton, it would be something they didn't know about to ruin the tobacco crop. Ever since she could remember it had been like that. Life on a sandhill farm held forth no more hope than unceasing toil to scrape a bare living from the sterile ground. Each year by the time they paid off shares and debts there was nothing left but hope that next year would be a little better.

Matty shoved the corn pone into the oven and grunted as she straightened up. At that moment Bonny hurried in, sloshing the water over the sides of the pail.

"Ma, there's somebody coming up from the road. I can't let him see me like this."

Matty watched her grab the comb from the bench and run into the other part of the house. There wasn't anybody Bonny cared that much about; it must be a stranger. Matty went out to the porch and looked down the twin ruts leading to the main road. It was a stranger all-right; he was slowly walking toward the house, fanning himself with a stiff straw hat. It wasn't a drummer either because he wasn't carrying anything, and he was wearing a light summer suit. Matty waited in silence until the stranger reached the porch and greeted her.

"It's an awful hot day to get my car stuck in the sand. I thought you might let me telephone for help."

"We ain't got one." Matty was vaguely disappointed that his errand was so impersonal. For a moment her imagination had played with images of lawyers and unknown rich relatives dying.

"Is there one somewhere near?"

"About three miles down the road at Mr. Flood's."

"That's too far to walk on a hot day. Do you suppose I might hire a tractor to pull me out?"

"Ya'll have to talk to Paw when he comes in. It ain't long to dinner time." She knew Paw would not object to picking up fifty cents or maybe a dollar. "Set there on the porch in the shade where it ain't so hot." Matty pointed out the only chair on the porch and, as the stranger seated himself, retreated to the door.

"You ain't from around here?" It was a statement of fact, but the rising inflection made it a question.

The stranger answered, "No. I'm driving from New York down to Florida. I was taking a shortcut a fellow at a filling-station told me about. But I took the wrong turn, and when I tried to turn around I slipped off into a sand ditch. It's worse than mud to get out of."

Matty couldn't think of anything more to say. In truth, she was somewhat awed at the casual way the stranger spoke of New York and Florida, as though driving from one to the other was a normal thing to do. She idly wondered what it would be like to live in town and work for regular wages. All a body had to do was take a quarter and go to a grocery store.

Talk like that made Paw mad. He said he wouldn't lick nobody's boot and act like a nigger, not even for a dollar an hour. She reckoned he ought to know because he had been all the way to Atlanta once with a load of Mr. Flood's cotton. But what really made him mad was remembering Mr. Flood got fifteen cents a pound for cotton he paid Paw seven cents for. Mr. Flood owned the only cotton gin in the whole county and was sheriff be-

sides.

But come a good crop, and maybe they could buy a piece of land somewhere and quit farming for shares. It was no kind of life. It was no way to raise a daughter up to expect the same poverty as her mother. Bonny was getting to be a pretty girl, and it was getting harder to keep the no account men away from her. The trouble was there was nobody around she could marry and be any better off.

Matty busied herself in the kitchen, but often found herself near the door, from where she studied the man on the porch. He was like nobody she ever knew before. It was the clothes made the difference. Put a man in a pair of overalls or breeches, shirt and vest, and Matty could figure out what he was up to. But a man who wore a suit as though he were used to it every day of his life was beyond her experience.

When she looked again he was smoking a cigaret and clipping his nails with a small instrument. He squinted to keep the smoke out of his eyes, and, when he finished the operation, he put the tool back in his pocket. He wriggled his shoulders to unstick his coat from his back, patted a curious bulge under his left arm, and then leaned back in the chair to concentrate on smoking the rest of his cigaret.

Matty heard Paw watering the mules out at the barn. She turned and called, "Bonny, come set the table. Yore Paw's coming in!"

From the barn a tall, hollow-cheeked man slowly walked up to the house. The stranger rose. With studied carelessness the older man looked past him to his wife. She nodded toward the stranger, "This fellow was wondering if you could help him get his car unstuck."

"Maybe," Paw spoke to his wife.

"He was wanting to hire the team," she added.

Paw looked with new interest at the stranger. He rubbed his hand along the graying stubble on his jaw. "After we eat and the mules have had a blow. It's kinda hot."

He removed his tattered straw hat, moved over to the water bucket, and brought up a gourd full. He tilted back his head and poured the water down his throat, letting it run over and dribble down his chin and neck. Another gourdful he changed from hand to hand, pouring the water over each of his bony wrists where one could see the pulse beating. A third dipper of water he let splash on his head and run down his neck and inside his shirt. Not finding the comb in its usual place on the bench, he plastered his hair down with his hands. He wiped his eyes and forehead across his shirtsleeve and then motioned the stranger into the kitchen.

There were two steaming plates of beans on the table. The old man sat down before one and motioned the stranger to sit down at the other. Matty put a pan of hot corn pone down between them. The ate in silence. The stranger slowly took alternate spoons of limas and a bit of the dry cornbread which he broke off. Paw rapidly gulped down his beans and sopped his bread in the juice. Bonny refilled his plate as full as before, even to the chunk of fat meat. The old man continued eating without talking, but his eyes were alert, and they observed the changes the stranger had caused. There was a jar of Matty's watermelon rind preserves which appeared on the table only on Sundays. And there was a salt and pepper set shaped like kegs with "Souvenir of Atlanta"

printed on them that Matty kept on the shelf and wouldn't put on the table so they might get broken.

It was mildly irritating that a complete stranger was shown courtesies that a man didn't get in his own home, but what really angered the old man was the change in Bonny. She was dressed up. For quite a while now he had known Bonny was grown. Often as he was plowing in the fields or chopping weeds a vision of her swelling breasts and rounded calves rose up before him. He would slap the reins at the mules or dig his hoe in the ground in sudden anger at the thought that any day some man would be sleeping with her.

Lately he had renewed the accusation against Matty that he was not the real father of Bonny, but Matty insisted he was, and deep down he knew she did not lie. He followed Bonny now with his eyes and watched how she would steal glances at the stranger. He finished eating without touching the preserves. He felt mean and wanted to hurt someone — assert himself before this dressed-up man who somehow made him feel inferior. He pushed back his plate. "Them butterbeans wasn't done," he announced, and, turning to look at Bonny, he asked, "Reckon you're going somewheres in them Sunday duds?"

Bonny blushed and glanced down at her skirt and waist. The old man followed up his thrust. "Them shoes must be pinching yore feet." He turned to regard the stranger. It was difficult to judge how far he might go without forfeiting the dollar or so he would make dragging the car out of the sand. He rose from his chair. "It's still too hot. We'll have to wait a while till the mules is rested." There was some comfort in knowing the stranger was dependent upon his decision as to when he chose to perform his service. It would put him in his place to make him wait a while. The old man went out to the porch, tilted back in the chair, and covered his eyes with his hat.

Matty heaped up two more plates. The man had lit a cigaret; Paw's actions had not seemed to upset his poise and calm. He thanked Matty for his meal and smoked while she and Bonny ate. He gazed steadily on Bonny, and when she looked up she blushed and turned back to her plate.

Matty no longer was awed as before. She found her tongue and questioned, "What line of goods are you in?"

The man smiled and flicked ashes into his plate. "Horses. Yes, horses you might say. It's a uncertain business, but now and then a pony pays off." He smiled again.

"Mr. Flood's got a horse, but you can't work them like mules. I'd think there was more money in mules."

"I don't sell them," said the stranger; "I just follow them."

Matty thought following horses must be profitable if it allowed a man to dress well and go driving around the country in a car. She began clearing the dishes. "Don't worry about the dishes, Bonny. Go show the gentleman around the place till yore Paw is ready."

The couple left and Matty cleared the dishes and stacked them in a dishpan. She poured a kettle of hot water over them and swabbed them with a rag. Out on the porch her husband continued to nap. There was no sound except the buzzing flies in the kitchen. Matty allowed herself the luxury of daydreaming about the time when she went up to Opalatchee with her sister. They ate

in a cafe, and Matty would never forget sitting down at a table and having a girl serve them chili. Opalatchee was the county seat, and she and Belle had to go up on some business connected with their father's death. Belle had sworn she was not going to stay down in the country after that. And she didn't either. Matty married shortly after, but Belle went back up to town and got herself a job as a waitress. She had not heard from her in years, but she understood she married and moved up near Athens, where her husband was in the trucking business. Matty stayed on and wore herself out looking after her man and a farm that would never pay. She bet that Belle, who was older, didn't look as old as she did now.

Matty finished the dishes and started sweeping out the kitchen so the chickens wouldn't come in after the crumbs. She reckoned she could have got a worse man than Paw. At least he wasn't shiftless, and he didn't get drunk more than a couple of times a year. Well, she had made her bed, but she didn't want Bonny to have to lay in it too.

She reached the porch in her sweeping and stopped. She figured Paw had been napping nearly half an hour, and Bonny was coming back with the stranger from the direction of the barn. "Paw," she called, "Reckon it was time you dragged him out of the ditch."

The old man stirred and stretched himself. He slowly got up as the two young people approached. "Reckon I'll go hitch up the mules," he said. "You come along and show me where the car is." He pointed at the stranger. Bonny went past her mother into the house without a word. The two men walked down toward the barn. Matty went back to the kitchen and picked up a bucket of scraps and slop and carried it back out on the porch. There was no use calling Bonny. She would carry the bucket down to the hogpen herself. She picked up the water bucket too; there was no sense coming back empty-handed when she could stop by the well and get some water.

She returned from her chores and busied herself in the kitchen for a time before she finally weakened and called out to her daughter. Bonny came in carrying a large cardboard box tied up. She put it on the table and went over to the bucket and drank a few sips of water from the gourd. Matty watched her and waited in silence.

The girl looked up, "I'm all right, Ma. I done what you said, and he's going to take me down to Florida with him, down to Miami. I can get a job down there. He says there's plenty of chances for a smart girl."

Matty sighed. "It's come sooner than we figured, but I reckon you might not get another chance for a long time, and it might be too late then." She went over and picked up the salt shaker in the shape of a keg and unscrewed the cork from the bottom. "Here's that ten dollars I been saving for you. Now don't forget to let me hear from you."

A horn sounded out front. Bonny darted over to her package. "He's ready, Ma. Paw's going to be awful mad, and I don't like leaving you."

Matty watched her daughter climb into the yellow convertible. Bonny waved as the car moved down the rutted drive to the road. It was better this way. When Paw heard about it he would rave and cuss and maybe get drunk. He was going to be mad; Paw was proud, but he didn't seem to know what it did to

a woman staying on a sandhill farm. Bonny was going to be all right. When Paw cooled down maybe Bonny would be coming back for a visit, wearing good clothes and talking about places she saw and not having to work like her Ma. Then the old man would see she did right.

From the doorway Matty could see Paw down at the barn unhitching the mules. He probably figured it was too late and too hot to go back in the fields. Matty gathered up the bucket to go to the well. He would want some cool water when he came in.

When the old man finally came up to the house he did not pause for water but went directly into the kitchen and sat down at the table without a word. Matty continued with her chores respecting his silence. After a time he asked, "Have we got some cool fresh water?"

Matty brought him the bucket and gourd dipper. He sipped slowly at the water. When he had finished he turned to Matty and spoke, "I hope she done the right thing."

Matty concealed her surprise at his knowledge. "I reckon she wouldn't get another chance for a long time."

The old man took out a creased and rumpled bill and smoothed it on the table. "He give me this ten dollars for pulling him out. I wonder what kind of a fool he thought I was." He carefully refolded the bill and returned it to his pocket. He placed his tattered straw hat back on his head as he rose and moved over to the door.

"What you aimin' to do?" Matty asked.

He cleared his throat and spat out into the yard. "I figured I'd take this ten dollars and hire me a nigger for a while so you won't have to go out in the fields." Then he was gone.

Matty slumped down at the table in silence. After a time tears welled in her eyes. It would be lonesome without Bonny, but she was happy for her. It was the best thing, so she was not really sad about Bonny. And Paw was good about it — not getting mad and thinking about her not having to chop weeds in the fields. She was happy about that. She thought some more and then figured she was blubbering just because she felt like it. For the first time in years she felt like crying.

In Memory of a Son

● **C. J. McGrath, Jr.**

Like the crocus in the false Spring,
you blossomed early; feeding on
light; forgetting the night of frost
yet to come.
You dared to dream of April
before the first robin had coursed
above the snow,
and a flower withered to my touch.

Contributors

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